UNITED NATIONS

World Chronicle

PROGRAMME: No. 565, recorded 13 October 1994

GUESTS: **Amb. Juan SOMAVIA**
Chairman, Preparatory Committee
World Summit for Social Development

James Gustave SPETH
Administrator
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Richard JOLLY
Deputy Executive Director
UNICEF

Samir SANBAR
Assistant Secretary-General
UN Department of Public Information

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Amb. Juan Somavia, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development, James Gustave Speth, Administrator for the United Nations Development Programme, Richard Jolly, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, and Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Public Information, discuss a wide range of issues related to the World Summit for Social Development, and what could be done to improve the life of ordinary people all over the world.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration:	28:00"
Executive Producer:	Kamil Taha
Director:	Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant:	Ellen McGuffie

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**. During the second week of March of 1995, the international community will convene, in Copenhagen, Denmark, a landmark meeting known as the World Summit for Social Development. It will be attended by a large number of heads of state and government as well as other delegations from all over the world. What is special about this meeting? And why is it so important?

Our guests today are in a unique position to reflect on the urgency for convening such a gathering. They are Ambassador Juan Somavia, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Social Summit; James Gustave Speth, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, or UNDP; Richard Jolly, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, or UNICEF; and Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Public Information. Gentlemen, welcome to World Chronicle.

Let's go back to the questions asked in the introduction: What's special about this meeting? Why is it so important? Ambassador Somavia, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, your answers.

SOMAVIA: Well, it's the first time in history -- I don't mean the history of the UN, in history -- that heads of state come together to discuss the problems of ordinary people -- questions of poverty, of unemployment, of violence, social tension, problems in the streets and in our inner cities -- in a practical way, saying that we have to concentrate on these issues, because these are the issues after the end of the cold war. During the cold war, it was military perspectives, ideological confrontations. In a certain sense what the Summit says is why don't we use the betterment of the lives of people, in all our societies, as the metre, as the way to judge whether the world is moving forward or backwards. That's what the new post-cold war era is about. In a certain sense, it's making the world more humane.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Speth, you are the head of the UN Development Programme, the largest multilateral aid agency, I believe. What are your comments on the importance of the summit session, the summit conference?

SPETH: I think Ambassador Somavia stated it quite well: it's really the issues that will be addressed. The phrase "Social Summit" doesn't communicate too well, I don't think, the real importance of the underlying issues that will be taken up at this meeting. We're talking about the most serious problems that societies face, both in the

rich countries and in the poor countries. Unemployment is wrecking our future, is wrecking societies. The projection for urban unemployment in Africa in the year 2000 is approximately one-third of the people, able-bodied people. And we know that countries in Europe and in the United States and elsewhere are experiencing serious unemployment problems. So this is throughout the world, North and South, this tragedy of unemployment, the famine of jobs. And this is something that we all have to tackle together.

LITTLEJOHNS: Dr. Jolly of UNICEF, what is the conference going to do for women and children?

JOLLY: I hope a lot, but I think the point I would stress to start with is it's special because it's the 50th anniversary of the United Nations and it's a chance not so much to look back but to look forward. And to me it's extremely significant that governments, the Secretary-General himself, have chosen this as the substantive issue for a 50th anniversary conference -- social development, the human issues, of course the issues of children and how we can improve the situation for children, but actually the situation of families, households, women, men, the older population -- to say these human concerns should be the centre of an evaluation, and also a centre for charting where the United Nations should go in its cooperation and programmes for the next half century.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Sanbar, we had Ambassador Somavia on this World Chronicle programme some little time ago talking also about the Summit, and he made the comment that this was not a summit with very high visibility. Now, you're the head of the Department of Public Information, what are you doing to improve the visibility of this exercise?

SANBAR: Well, we're starting with this programme to begin with, but basically I think Ambassador Somavia is right, there has been a lack of visibility for the conference for various reasons. One, of course, is that there was a conference in Cairo and people were more covering Cairo before getting to Copenhagen. But I think we're working together to draw a certain strategy, a plan of action, which includes roundtables and conferences and meetings and the involvement of important key players of the world community who have or will have an effect on the issues. But the real challenge is to highlight the issues and link these upcoming conferences. You had Cairo, you have Copenhagen --

LITTLEJOHNS: Cairo, the Population Conference.

SANBAR: The Population Conference. Then you're having the Social Summit in Copenhagen, then you are going to Beijing, the Conference on Women. And the

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important aspect is to highlight the interrelationship between the issues of these conferences, which is very, very important. The challenge really for us is to mobilize the media, public opinion, on economic and social issues, which is not always attractive to the media. Most of the UN work, about 70 per cent, is on economic and social issues. But then most of the attention of the media is on that other 25 or 30 per cent, which is on political questions. And I think we all are trying to find out how to really mobilize public opinion to deal with these issues other than just pay attention only to crises or situations that only have a political component.

LITTLEJOHNS: Looking at the conference realistically, what do you gentlemen expect to come out of it? Are you optimistic that it's going to produce something? After all, we've had summits before, and some have been successful. You had a summit on children, which was, I think, quite successful. Very successful, you'd say?

JOLLY: I would say very successful, but the test is not the words of the day, it's the deeds of the decade. And I hope that out of this World Summit for Social Development will come an action plan and a few key goals. I think the goal, already much discussed, of eradicating the worst of world poverty is a practicable goal, and if the Summit was to bless this at the highest level, then set in motion each country drawing up some form of national plan of action, it would provide a frame of action for the international community to work with governments to achieve this. Many people may think that sounds unrealistic. If in fact you look at what Indonesia has done, for example, they have brought down the rate of poverty over the last 20 years from 60 to 14 per cent. And you could go through a lot of other countries that have shown it is possible -- not all poverty, not all the problems, but the worst aspects. It's a much more practicable goal, and I think this would be a great chance to implement it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Somavia, you're from Latin America: what do the Latin American countries expect to emerge from it?

SOMAVIA: Well, I think that basically we need to take commitments. We can either have a summit on words or a summit on commitments. Now, the way things now stand is that it has to be on commitments. We even have listed nine commitments, nine potential commitments that could be taken. We're still in the process of negotiation, they may become less or more, but the idea that you have to take commitments on certain actions. And definitely the first one has to be on the worst forms of poverty or extreme poverty, whichever way we want to say. Now, people tend to say, well, but you know, we've been struggling with poverty for so long, there's nothing new. No, the new thing is that we are taking a commitment to say this is a priority in our national and international policies, and we want to make -- we want to declare that at a global level.

Because obviously these are, to begin with, national responsibilities that require international support. But the fact that we say it all together, it becomes a collective commitment of all towards everybody else that these are the priorities.

Together with that, we want to highlight all that has to do with employment. We know that employment is a complex issue. Small and medium enterprises are producing today the greatest employment. We also have to take a look at some of the things that are happening on the side of the economic instruments: for example, the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the Monetary Fund have had very high, too high a human cost. One of the proposals of the Summit is that we need to integrate in adjustment policies, which basically means that you have to equilibrate your finances, which is a normal thing to do, and the Summit is for the adjustment. The question is why should the weight of the adjustment fall on the weak in a society.

So I'm just mentioning two or three things that are the types of commitments that are going to come out which are very practical. So there is, I would say, an ethical and political dimension to it, and also very concrete, specific step-by-step things that the Summit is mapping out that can be done and the Summit says should be done.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Speth, the Ambassador mentioned the restrictive clauses, or whatever you want to call them, that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have imposed on poor countries, or developing countries. Do you have any comment on their policies? Do you think that perhaps they should be changed?

SPETH: I think there's a broad agreement that we need a more balanced approach to adjustment. We've had an economics-only adjustment focusing on the macro-economic variables, and we haven't had a social adjustment, an environmental adjustment to go with this economic adjustment, so the effects have been mixed. We need to push improving the lives of people and sustaining the environment for the future with the same enthusiasm and the same resources and the same commitment that we've been pushing the macro-economic structural adjustment. But let me add one other thing which I think is very important. The three themes of the conference are, as Mr. Jolly very correctly indicated: the priority on eliminating the worst aspects of world poverty; we've talked also about the problem of jobs and unemployment; the third theme is social integration. And here we face probably in some ways the most difficult of all these challenges. Because the world is really a disaster machine today, turning out crises with depressing frequency. And this issue of social integration, of binding societies together, of healing old wounds, of bringing people into a common social and political framework that succeeds, is something the UN has been leading on around the world, helping countries, in Cambodia, now in Rwanda, now in Haiti, and other places. And I think

this theme of building bridges between people, of a culture of peace, of social integration, reconciliation of tribes, this has to be addressed in this conference. Because otherwise we're going to see these events as recently occurred in Rwanda repeated on a depressing scale.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Sanbar, the poor people of the world are the ones that are supposed to be benefitting from this conference, what comes out of it. What can be done to keep them aware of what is being or will be done at the conference?

SANBAR: I believe we could try to utilize the media, or the medium, which is --

LITTLEJOHNS: You just mentioned a little while ago that the media are not very interested in social development.

SANBAR: No, this is our challenge, to make the media more interested and to use the medium which is more accessible to them. For example, in many of the poor countries it's the radio that's very much listened to, and this is why I think we should try to utilize the radio as much as possible in these features. And in some countries there is not even one newspaper, and if there is a paper it sells maybe about 500 copies. So the radio is a very important medium in certain areas. Maybe some gatherings and group meetings or mobile film showings in some of the villages, and so forth. So an important effort should be done to use the medium which is most likely to be accessible to these people and, in fact, have different target audiences to whatever objective you want to reach.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is a special edition of World Chronicle. Our guests are Ambassador Juan Somavia, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Social Development; James Gustave Speth, the Administrator of UNDP; Richard Jolly, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; and Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Public Information. Ambassador Somavia, I think you were about to say something.

SOMAVIA: Yes. I think that in being able to change the perceptions we have also to understand that there is an enormous indifference in the world on the sorts of issues that the Summit is dealing with. The tendency today is to say, well, I have to care about my own problems, and, you know, if poor people are poor, that's their problem. So there is a function of the UN also of putting certain issues on the table and saying, look, these are global problems of humanity, we need to be able to look at them with a new perspective which recognizes that we cannot let insecurity grow in the world. Once we've put to rest the nuclear bomb, we are observing all over the place that the social bomb is exploding. But it just so happens that the social bomb that explodes on the other side of the world is affecting this side of the world also.

So there is, in the Summit, an effort to explain the interrelation of security. You're not going to have individual security in certain societies if you have an enormous level of individual insecurity and personal insecurity in other societies. So we have to understand that together with the security of the state we have to move into the realm of the security of people. And how do we deal with that problem? It's a complex issue. We haven't done it before. In the UN it's dialogue between governments. We have an overriding concept of non-intervention. The life of people occurs within a certain territory. So these are difficult issues. It will take time to work them out and to come out with concepts and principles that can deal with these matters. This is a first step in the direction of saying, look, if too many people are insecure somewhere else, that winds up making insecure my own society. And that is called migration, it's called drugs, it's called terrorism, and a number of other things. So there is a collective need to think in a different way also.

LITTLEJOHNS: I guess some of us saw the Public Television programme on the life of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who is best known for the New Deal. Mr. Speth, do you think there could be a global New Deal out of this conference?

SPETH: I think the Four Freedoms that Roosevelt spoke about are very important today, including freedom from want, which is a global tragedy. And that's what this conference -- I think the main thing that we can get out of the Social Summit, and I hope we will get out of it, is a very powerful commitment, a compact among nations to attack the worst aspects of world poverty, much as there was a momentum that developed against slavery in the 19th century. I hope we can develop the same kind of global momentum to eliminate the worst aspects of world poverty, and let each country define what it means by poverty. In China they have a programme which is targeting, I think it's 40 million people who are at the lowest level, and are trying to deal with those people. So each country could choose its own concept, its own approach to attacking this problem, and then the international community could support it in those efforts.

LITTLEJOHNS: What are UNDP and UNICEF, for example, and the other agencies in the UN system doing at the present time that a summit conference is needed to draw attention to, perhaps?

JOLLY: I think we've actually teamed up UNDP, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, UNESCO, WHO in working out how one can get the resources for this programme. Always people imagine it collapses because everyone says the right words, but where does the money come from? And we have teamed up together to make some calculations as to what resources will be needed and how, by reordering

priorities, one could find the resources within the existing national budgets and within the existing aid budgets. It's not easy, it's got to be a tough prioritization, but this to my mind is very appropriate for how we get together in order to look ahead, how we will implement that.

If I could make one point in relation to your question on Roosevelt, if you read the Four Freedoms, some of not only Roosevelt's speeches but of the founding fathers of the United Nations and the founding fathers of the Bretton Woods organizations, they were not afraid of idealism and vision. They looked at the problems growing out of the Second World War and they imagined how they could not only be different but what they could do to make them different. I hope this summit, by bringing back issues of human concern in every country to centre stage, could help us all not to be afraid of idealism; to say the world is so much richer today than it was in 1945, why don't we use a proportion of those riches in order to tackle the problems of the worst affected, the poverty. We've not mentioned Africa. Africa is in a crisis. It would not take very much of world resources to give Africa the further helping hand it needs -- in debt relief, to remobilize its economy, to deal with the human problems in Africa. And I think the Summit could be a start for this.

SPETH: We have to, I think, face this issue of resources. It's a very serious problem right now, because the international commitment to development cooperation seems to be on the wane, and for the first time since 1973 the resources available in development cooperation have started turning down.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is the so-called "donor fatigue" you're talking about?

SPETH: I'm afraid so. And it seems to be associated with a number of factors, including the fading of the cold war rationale for keeping up development cooperation. But the thing that I see when I go around and visit our programmes in developing countries is the fact that the biggest problem is scale. People understand a lot about what needs to be done in their countries. And our programmes in the UN are able to be of genuine help. And the biggest problem of all is that we have not been able to mount initiatives and to help governments mount initiatives on a scale commensurate with the problems that they face. And that's going to require --

LITTLEJOHNS: Simply from lack of funds.

SPETH: Exactly.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Sanbar, the Department of Public Information, what are you doing to address the problems of poverty in the developing countries, and worldwide, in fact?

SANBAR: Well, we are working closely with our colleagues in the UN system, especially UNDP and UNICEF, the information colleagues there, to highlight the issues which are priority issues to highlight. We're trying, of course, to work together with the members of the system accordingly. I would add here that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, has expressed special interest in this particular conference which is forthcoming in Copenhagen and formed the Steering Group, which all our colleagues here are participating in, in order to prepare for the conference. He has mentioned it to every head of state he meets and made a special effort to really mobilize public opinion and support for the conference. So I think there is this attempt, if you wish, by the UN community to challenge the theory that good news is no news. And it is that, I think, where we have to try our best and do our --

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Speth spoke about a lack of funds. Are you having a problem with funding in DPI?

SANBAR: Well, everybody has a problem with lack of funds. And I think the most valuable resource of course is the human resource, our colleagues and the staff concerned. And the best attempt having limited funds -- and we all have to work from existing resources, to use a famous phrase by the Assembly -- is to mobilize as much as we can the staff we have, and use them in the best possible way. And also to work closely with our colleagues in the UN system, like UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and others, to utilize whatever we have, to alert the public, especially key decision-makers, to the problems involved. And I would also say that the delegations are an important part of our effort. Because although public information is the responsibility of the Department of Public Information, the UN image and the UN perspective, perception, is of concern to everybody, including member states, delegations, and members of the UN system.

LITTLEJOHNS: You are very much involved with the non-governmental organizations, NGOs. How much are they going to be involved?

SANBAR: Well, very much so. First of all, we had an international conference in September on the role of the NGOs in supporting the UN system. In the preparation for Copenhagen, for the Social Summit, we have a special group, working group, to coordinate the work of the NGOs, and we've had already two meetings in that area. We hope to accelerate our effort as we get closer to Copenhagen.

LITTLEJOHNS: We have only a couple of minutes left. Can we go around the table and get your very brief assessment of how the situation looks at the present time and what you think is going to happen as a result of it all?

SOMAVIA: I think that we're going to have a successful summit with an important presence of heads of state, and that we're going to make a breakthrough on

the poverty issue, with an emphasis on feminization of poverty, of unemployment, of violence in the house and other places, and also with the fact that youth unemployment is normally double or more the normal unemployment in a region. So the statement of principle -- practical action. The most basic thing now is to start thinking about follow-up.

LITTLEJOHNS: Dr. Jolly?

JOLLY: Cairo was a great success. And it showed when women are involved, when non-governmental organizations are involved, you can get a very exciting, vibrant mixture. I hope we will be able to achieve that in Copenhagen, and I hope in the run-up to Copenhagen schools everywhere will get their children in different ways looking at what this might mean, what they would like to see happening.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Speth, we have less than a minute left.

SPETH: We are very optimistic that the heads of state will attend, and scores have already committed to attend. But I think one of the key things that we have to do is to encourage every head of state to attend. Because this conference, perhaps more than any other, deals with issues of tremendous political salience in society. These are issues that governments rise and fall on, and so I would just encourage all the heads of state to attend.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Sanbar?

SANBAR: The conference is on issues, and the issues will continue and be there, and I think all our efforts together would help solve this.

LITTLEJOHNS: So the consensus is that it's going to be a great conference, a great success, and a plan of action is going to come out of it, and we're going to have a global New Deal, right? Gentlemen, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this special edition of World Chronicle.

Our guests have been Ambassador Juan Somavia, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development; James Gustave Speth, the Administrator of UNDP; Richard Jolly, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; and Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Public Information. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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